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THE WOMAN WHO STOOD BETWEEN

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BY

MINNIE GILMORE

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"A SON OF ESAU," "PIPES FROM PRAIRIE-LAND," ETC.

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THE WOMAN WHO STOOD BETWEEN.

I.

I WILL begin by confessing the truth, *I did it.*

Messrs. Kane, Joyce, and Mulford, my lawyers; Mr. Dwight, of the *Daily Luminary;* Mr. Ward, of the *Evening Eye.*

Two, three more chairs, if you please. Thank you.

The condemned cell has its privileges, you see, like the condemned man. You flinch, gentlemen. Face to face with the condemned, you realize that you, who justify the law of capital punishment, are his condemners. I, in my youth and strength, I,

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your brother-freeman, am to be gagged and bound by brute force, dragged to my death like a beast, condemned by the jury that represents you, murdered by the coward-blow of the law you uphold!

There are thoughts burning my brain, there are words scorching my lips, white-hot flames from the yawning hell called the grave. Let them pass! *I did it!* and "An eye for an eye!" "A tooth for a tooth!" cries the Old Law, deafening Christian ears to the "Vengeance is Mine" of the New.

Another visitor? Ah, you, Father! The Catholic chaplain, gentlemen; may God bless him!

Now I will tell my story. But I must begin at the beginning, and tell it in my own way.

II.

I AM thirty years old. My name is Von Vost. My father was of German birth; my mother an Irishwoman and a Catholic. I loved my father best. There was that sympathy between us which coexists, I think, with striking physical resemblance. He was strong and fair, like his father before him. Both had eyes like the blue *Rheinwasser*, and hair like the sun on the *Bieberich* vinelands. I, as you see, am of slightly darker type, owing to my Celtic mother. She had the Irish-gray eyes that go with black hair and lashes, "stars set in midnight skies," my father called them. Her cheeks and lips had the flush of Killarney's rose upon them. In her way, she was as hand-

some as my father in his; otherwise he had never loved her. For generations the Vost women have been famous for their beauty. "*As beautiful as a Von Vost's wife*" is still a proverb in the *Bieberich* district of the *Vaterland.*

My mother was my father's second wife. His first wife died—no matter how. She was beautiful—and light. She betrayed my father. One morning she was found face-downward in the rushes where the Rhine-waves lap the *Bieberich* vinelands, her beautiful hair unbound, her beautiful white breast bare, her hand still clutched on the hilt of the dagger sheathed in her pulseless heart. She had slain herself in an hour of emotional delirium, the wise world said. So let it be.

But thereafter, for my father, the *Vaterland* was haunted. In every place, at every

turn, her dead face confronted him. Every familiar scene became a thing of dread and horror. At last he fled, meeting my mother on the passage out. She was simple, healthful, innocent; magnetically attractive, I think, to my father's shattered nerves and morbid mind. Truth shone in her clear eyes, purity blushed on her lips. Soon, love glowed in her warm heart. When the time was ripe, he told her enough of his story to make her pity him; not, unhappily for her, enough to make her fear and flee him. In Castle Garden, on the day they reached shore, they were married.

"For richer, for poorer," "for better, for worse," read the marriage-service.

"For poorer," "for worse," it proved for both. It is a mistake for a man to hamper himself with a wife at the outset of his career, as my father learned to his cost.

"There are women for all men, but wives only for the rich," he said, afterward; and many a poor man echoes him.

Marriage without love is hell, and Poverty is Love's murderer; no merciful assassin, swift and sure; but a slow, cruel, torturing strangler-in-the-dark, within whose skeleton-clutch Love curses love, and dies!

My mother loved to the end, like a woman; but my father — you are all men; you will understand. Poverty makes saints of a few men, devils of the many. He was of the many; and the socialistic taint in the Vost blood, that had impoverished it generation by generation in the Monarchy, still impoverished it in the Republic.

The Republic? Faugh! Under the humble name the crown of Gold, the throne of Power, the monarch of Monopoly, masquerade like kings in the cloaks of peasants.

Freedom! Fraternity! Equality! Hell laughs at the lying words, and heaven abominates them. Under the stars and stripes, as under the crown and sceptre, it is the great against the small, the strong against the weak, the high against the lowly, the rich against the poor!

"You are my slave!" cries Wealth to Poverty. "Serve, in silence!"

God help the slave, in service or rebellion! The slave who serves is suffered to exist—not to live, as a man, mind; but to exist, physically, with other brute-beasts of burden. The slave who rebels is lashed for life to the whipping-post. Upon the hope of the young, the despair of the old, the naked heart of the man, the soft white breast of the woman, the knout falls alike. Its open wounds, its unhealed scars, you may see in every slum and tenement and brothel.

"Drink is the cause!" cry the moralists.

They lie. Drink is the effect. Where Rum is the gate through which the poor pass to hell, Despair is the road that has led to it.

III.

As I have said, I loved my father. In his way, he loved me. I was of his flesh, his blood—the Vost blood. He knew the hell-flame that was in it, and gloated as he kindled it. Over his *meerschaum* and *bier*, week after week, month after month, year after year, he whispered, not as my mother supposed, the folk-tales of the *Vaterland*, but tales of violence, of rapine, of blood-shed; tales whose memory peopled my nights with hideous phantoms, haunted my dreams with the shrieks of the dying, and the staring eyes of the dead. Only my mother's prayers, whispered over my head as a lullaby is crooned over a cradle, could soothe me.

Those woman-prayers—how restfully they contrasted with the oaths of the drinking, desperate men crowding our poor room from dusk to daybreak, rousing me from my childish sleep with their bloody threats against the rich and great! My father, when he had drunk too deeply, would snatch me from the bed, and tearing the rosary from my weeping mother's hand, bid me kiss its crucifix, and swear thereon this terrible threefold oath :

1. *To hate with an undying hatred, relentless as fate, strong as death, fierce as hell, the proud, the rich, and the mighty!*

2. *To consecrate my body, my mind, my heart, my life, my death, to the cause of the humble, the poor, the powerless!*

3. *To spill the blood, to its last red drop, of the man, woman, or child who should stand between me and the triumph of my cause.*

Over and over again, in the "wee sma' hours," by the light of the kerosene-lamp, in the close room reeking with the fumes of rum and tobacco, I took the oath; while the men cheered, and my mother wept, and prayed heaven not to hear me.

"Hate loses causes; Love wins them!" she sobbed. "He shall spill no blood, my white-handed, white-souled boy. You are demons, not men, to ask it."

But the words and tears of a woman—what are they? Like her prayers, things for men to jeer at.

Does even God heed them?

IV.

My father died as he had lived. My mother and I watched by his death-bed through the long, chill night, into the dismal daybreak. His boon companions, the companions of his pipe and beer, had deserted him. Only one remained, stretched like a dog by the fire, sunk in a drunken stupor.

My father would have no priest, no minister. When my mother, in the name of God, implored him, his dying curse was his answer. He turned from her, and beckoned me. Under the pillow his nerveless hand was fumbling. It drew forth a dagger. Well I knew the story of the slender pointed dirk in its shabby sheath! As I touched its hilt, I shuddered. It felt like the chill dead

hand of the fair, false woman whose blood-stained breast had been washed for the grave by the waves of the blue Rhine-water. As he pressed it into my hand, he repeated the threefold oath. His life-breath passed his lips with it.

"Swear it!" he panted—"'*to hate—the rich!—to live for—the humble!—to spill the blood*——'"

As he sank back, the death-rattle sounding in his throat, the light that failed in his glaring eyes seemed to flame anew in mine. All that, hitherto, I had accepted blindly, in childish submission to circumstances, I now looked upon with mature, suddenly rebellious eyes. The narrow street beneath, with its sunken cobble-stones, its stagnant puddles, its malodorous heaps of garbage; the opposite tenement, with pitchers and pails littering its window-sills, its

myriad clothes-lines hung with ugly garments, its bare-armed women and unkempt children with faces flattened against the panes; our own little room, with its single small-paned window through which the sunless morning glared like a pallid ghost, the bare floor, the plaster walls, the scant, rude furniture; the drunkard in his brutish sleep; my mother's shabby gown, whose rolled-up sleeves revealed her once handsome arms and hands, now coarse and mottled from toil and exposure; my own gaunt frame growing in all directions out of my ill-shaped clothes, my clumsy copper-toed boots, my hands, dingy and purple with the chill in my blood, and of the brawny, coarse-veined, square-fingered mould that branded me the son of the toiler; above all, the face of the man on his death-bed, the strong, fair Teuton face lined now with the marks of evil

passions, surly and gross, swollen and purple still from recent debauch, in spite of the pallor of death, the rigor of dissolution already setting their fatal seal upon it—in all, Poverty in its nude hideousness, burst upon me—Poverty that means not the fault, nor even the misfortune, of the poor; but the wrong of the monopolist, the yoke of the oppressor, the blight, the curse, the damnation of the oppressed!

Over my sickened soul surged a wave of passionate pity for the dying man before me. And the world held hosts of just such piteous victims—my father was but one!

My mother's rosary, placed there by her pious hands, lay upon his breast. Impulsively, I caught it up. The oath so often sealed by my childish kiss upon it, leaped once more to my lips.

The brown beads jingled against one an-

other. The sound roused my father from his death-lethargy—called him back from the brink of the dark valley where all go, none return. With the sudden strength of ebbing life's last moment, his pale lips spoke.

"Swear!" he gasped, in a hollow voice that the grave already muffled—"swear '*to spill the blood of man, woman*——'"

"I swear it!" I cried; but he did not hear me.

On that last word—"woman"—his lips shut over. He fell back, dead.

V.

I HAD gone to my father's death-bed a boy. I left it a man. My mother, with love's acuteness, saw the change; but whether it boded good or ill, even her love could not divine. She took her doubt to her priest on the Sunday following my father's burial.

The priest was a good old man, with kind eyes and a gentle voice. I listened respectfully when at her request he came to talk to me; but I answered not a word. My silence puzzled him. More than once I caught his keen eyes scrutinizing me from under their shaggy brows.

"What the boy needs is education," he said to my mother, at parting; "education

for soul, as well as brain. Send him to our parochial school for a few years. God will not let you starve, meanwhile."

"We shall not starve," she said, proudly.

She was capable, industrious, and thrifty, and had learned fine needle-work in an Irish convent—such needle-work as cloistered vestals do, whose white hearts stitch with their threads the altar linens. The latter years of my father's life had been one long carouse. The sale of her delicate handiwork had alone kept the roof over our heads, the wolf from our door.

"We shall not starve," she repeated. "He shall go to your school, my Father."

Then I spoke. I can hear my boyish voice now, strong yet tremulous, defiant yet timid; the voice in which the keys of childhood and manhood both jarred and blended.

"I shall not go to your school," I said. "I will have State education, or none. You educate the poor exclusively. You teach the creed of one church. The State educates poor and rich alike, and teaches the American creed of universal brotherhood. I will begin even as I shall end—on common ground, on equal footing, with my generation."

"My son," said the old priest, gently, "there is no common ground, no equal footing, save before God alone."

Were his words true or false? My brain is whirling. I do not know.

VI.

My mother wept, but she let me have my way. I was a good son to her, in spite of the tears I caused her. If I did not go to her church, neither did I go to the bar-room; if I earned neither the bread I ate, nor the clothes I wore, neither did I squander one penny of her hard earnings upon folly or pleasure. Day and night, night and day, I pored over books, books, books — impelled by lust not for knowledge, but for the power knowledge alone gives. The contest to which my arms were consecrated was a mental contest, not a physical one, though fools and knaves swear otherwise. By nature I was well equipped for my mission, with a quick mind, an eloquent tongue, an impressive

presence. One can afford to speak without false modesty on the brink of his open grave.

With education, my equipment was complete. Not with the education of books, however, though these included the works of Rousseau, Fichte, Bakunin, St. Simon, Carlyle, Fourier, Mill, Spencer, Comte, Marx, Tolstoi, up to our own Henry George. These were but the beginning. My intelligence told me that I must know men, women, the world, life, before I could hope to reform them.

I studied these in the palaces, and in the prisons; in the theatres, and in the hospitals; in the factories, and in club-windows; on the boulevards, and in the gin-shops. I trod the highways of the rich, and the byways of the poor; followed the saint to the shrine, and the sinner to the slums; watched

the belle as she swept to her carriage, and dogged the slave-girl from the sweater's shop to the dance-hall, and to the midnight-hell to which the dance-hall leads. I studied the young blood sipping his wines, and the tramp as he drained stale beer with his bloated mouth to the keg. I studied the work of the politician, and the play of his silent partner, the financier. I studied the dowager at her dinner, and the work-woman as she starved that her child might eat. I studied the heiress in her box at the opera, and her sister outside on the pavement—the girl of the street. On land, on sea, in the Old World's Kingdoms, in the New World's Republic, I stood at Poverty's cradle, toiled with Labor, caught the crumbs of the feast of Capital, followed Wealth to its splendid tomb. Just how I did it, no matter. The end is the question, not the means. When

the education of Life supplemented the education of books, I was ripe for my mission.

In the meantime my mother died.

VII.

I REGRETTED her, after a fashion. There is something about a woman, I think, which a man misses when she is gone, though he may have been scarcely sensible of her presence. Her little brown rosary was buried with her. I felt a pang as the coffin-lid shut upon it. Somehow it seemed associated not only with my past, but with my future; since all that was to come after was but the consequence of the oath, sealed by my kiss on its crucifix—which had gone before. But of my oath I did not need the crucifix to remind me. Of the lesson of hate, my father had taught me the beginning. Of Life—the world, men and women—I learned it to its end.

Again and again, in the impatience of youth, I had resolved to enter upon my social mission, but a mystic something had held me back. As I turned from the grave in which my mother was laid to sleep, I was suddenly conscious that the restraining influence was removed. I felt myself not only freed, but pushed forward. I pressed on blindly, knowing neither why, nor whither. Suddenly I found myself at the door of the house in which my father had died.

VIII.

The neighborhood, as was but natural, was changed—changed, which seems less credible, for the worse. The street was dirtier, the tenements shabbier, the daylight paler. Between the roofs of the adjacent avenue sped the Elevated. The shops about were of a lower grade; the rum-shops increased in number. The steps upon which I had played in my boyhood were notched and broken. The remnant of a door-plate I remembered, dangled by one rusty nail.

I rang the bell. A dark-eyed girl answered it. The garret was empty, she told me, in answer to my question. I told her I would take it, before I asked her the price. My mother had amassed me a snug little sum

by her savings. My heart felt warm, where the bank-notes lay. I had drawn them that morning. The girl smiled as I followed her, and looked back at me, her dark eyes flashing with sudden brightness over her stooped shoulders. She was young, and nature is nature. I was a new interest, because a new possibility, in her narrow life.

Her mother lay in the hall, in a drunken sleep. She had a large coarse face, framed in dishevelled hair. A shapeless wrapper of striped blue calico covered her. Over her heaving bust her hands were folded—strong, hard hands, purple with stagnant blood. My voice roused her, and her hands unfolded. Through a rent in her wrapper one gross nude breast was exposed. The girl flushed scarlet, and stooping, deftly pinned the rent. The woman's bleared eyes opened. With a muttered oath she lifted her hand, and struck

the girl across the face. It was a brutal blow. I could fancy the sting and burn of it, but the girl said nothing, neither did I. I handed the woman a roll of dollars, which she clutched greedily, and went up-stairs. I heard the girl's voice, pained yet patient, explaining as I ascended.

As I entered the room in which my father had died, I felt his unseen presence in it. The room seemed smaller than in my youth, the walls closer, the ceiling lower. I threw up the window, and turned to the bed. It was soiled and disordered, evidently untouched since the previous lodger had left it. I looked at it long and intently, till I had rid myself of the fancy that my father, ghastly in death, still lay upon it.

The hearth upon which the drunken watcher had slept was littered with rags and paper. I missed my mother's stove and

dresser, the many womanly knick-knacks with which she had made even that poor room a home. A wash-stand, teetering on three legs under the weight of a cracked bowl and broken-nosed pitcher; a square table, and a few cheap chairs, furnished the room.

I drew a chair to the window and bowed my head on its sill. My childhood, my boyhood, my mother's face, were before me. Almost for the first time in my life, a soft chord vibrated within me. In that room whose walls had echoed with my unholy oath of hate, where my father had died with threats of bloodshed reeking on his lips, a long-forgotten word of my mother's recurred to me: "*Hate loses causes: Love wins them!*"

Why did the gentle words haunt me? Premonitory of what was to follow, they issued like warning wraiths love-loosened from death-locked mother-lips.

IX.

I was roused from my reverie by the rustle of the girl's dress behind me. She had entered without knocking, clean sheeting on her arm. On her cheek was the blood-red scar of her mother's blow. I looked her over from head to foot, as I had never before looked at a woman—not as a man looks at the one fair woman he loves; but as I fancy my father had looked at my mother, the fresh-skinned Irish girl with the pure, true heart, as his haunted eyes shuddered from the phantom-face staring at him from the dank Rhine-rushes. Her brown eyes were like a dog's—patient and faithful. Her red mouth drooped at the corners. It seemed to accent the pathos of the blood-red scar.

She was not short, though her head, as we stood together, had barely reached my shoulder; but neither was she—though she looked as if she should have been—tall. She was like a young tree stunted. Her figure was neither slender nor plump, but her movements were lithe, in spite of a halt in her gait which impeded them. My eyes followed her. I think she was not handsome — I am not sure. I know only that she touched me. As she passed within reach I pulled her to me and kissed her. Her drooping mouth curled upward. The blood-red scar burned redder, but I think it no longer hurt her. She told me, in answer to my question, that her name was Nan.

That night I slept the deep, dreamless, unbroken sleep of a child. As I passed down the stairs in the morning, Nan came hastening out of the lower room, smiling at me expect-

antly. I brushed by her without a word. The impulse of the day before had been a weakness. With a new day, my strength had returned. I knew then that the day was to be, even as I know now that it was, a fateful one. When I had had my simple breakfast of German bread and coffee, I hesitated for a moment in the doorway of the little shop, and then turned up the street toward the bustling avenue. The mystic force was again impelling me, why or whither, I knew not. I knew only that I must obey it.

From the steeple of the church where my mother had knelt each night and morning, eight slow strokes sounded, as I started on my walk. As I returned, the eight slow strokes resounded. Twenty-four hours had elapsed between them—hours in which I had tramped the city—the rich city, the poor city—my footsteps grinding, grinding, grind-

ing like iron wheels through my brain. When they ceased, at last, the work of the wheels was done. The seething impressions, thoughts, sentiments, which were the aggregate random mental accumulation of years, had been moulded into definite shape. The goal toward which the mystic force had impelled me was now in sight.

Under the tenement was a small stationer's shop. Like one in a dream, I entered it, and snatching up a ream of legal-cap paper, pushed it toward the clerk.

"Pens," I demanded, unconsciously pointing to a case of gold pens set in the showcase.

"Gold?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Hell-fire, no!" I cried. "Keep your gold for the rich. The poor man's pen is of steel—like his sword."

He looked at me with fear in his eyes.

"Ink?" he asked, tremulously, holding a bottle toward me.

"Yes, red ink," I cried—"blood-red!"

His hands trembled as he made my change. He was an old man, and alone. Evidently he thought me a murderous maniac. As I shut the door behind me, he sprang over the counter, and locked it. I passed Nan on the stairs; she cried out as she saw me. I understood why, as I glanced into the cracked glass hung over the teetering wash-stand. My face was white and rigid—ghastly as the face of the dead.

But the eyes—ah! the eyes were living!

X.

For three days and nights, as I know now, I wrote without a pause, conscious of nothing save that the mystic force impelled me to write on. I was dimly conscious of a loaf of bread, a jug of milk or beer, placed beside me—of a lamp set before me as the days darkened, which I pushed away with impatient hand, as the sun of redawning morning put its pallid flame to shame. Thus went the days and nights.

As the fourth day dawned, my pen fell from my hand. Its work was finished. It was the key that had unlocked all that had been pent within me for years and years. The seething waters of my soul, dammed

over-long, had forced their dyke at last; bursting forth in mighty billows which I had only to record as they flashed by. Wealth was the leviathan that lurked beneath them; Poverty the prey that drifted, shrieking, to its fate.

All, in relation to vital social questions, that I had accumulated by experience, observation, study, hearsay—all that I had assimilated by long and profound thought; all that I had felt, hoped, feared, loved, hated—all my pity for the oppressed, my scorn for the oppressors — all my scathing wrath against Capital the wronger, all my fierce desire to right Labor the wronged—were inscribed in blood-red characters before me. Without pause, doubt, error, erasure, I had written. Tongue could not have spoken, even as pen had not flown fast enough, to keep pace with the inspiration that impelled

it. I had not been the author, but only the transcriber of the burning words before me. As I have said, my work was finished. My pen dropped from my hand.

I awoke to consciousness of Nan's face, womanly-tender, bending over me.

"I thought you was dead," she said. "You're only starvin'. See?"

She pointed to the table. Milk and bread and beer stood there untouched, side by side with the smoked lamp. For three days and nights I had not eaten, drunk, or slept. I seized the stale loaf, and gnawed it greedily. She caught up the pitcher, and disappeared, returning with it filled with foaming beer. I drank the generous draught to the last drop. Then I fell back, and to sleep, simultaneously. When I awoke it was twenty-two hours later, eight in the morning, by the church clock.

I rose, and caught up the manuscript, piled as I had left it, on the little table. Unwashed, unshaved, with my garments creased and rumpled by my long sleep in them, I dashed from the obscure street into one of the great thoroughfares. Block after block I walked past the double file of promenaders, well-groomed men on their way down to Wall Street; tailor-made women on their constitutional morning walk; middle-class folk of both sexes, going humbly, almost apologetically, their unobtrusive way; belated working-men and women bound for store and workshop; poor girls and boys hurrying to yards and factories, while their richer brothers and sisters sauntered to school and college; past trucks and cars and carriages on one side, past glittering shops, great and small, upon the other, on—on—on—till the sign of a famous publishing-house

caught my eyes. Without hesitation I opened the door, and stepped in.

A dapper young clerk addressed me before I had shut the door behind me.

"What is it you wish?" his lips said, but I did not hear them.

He was looking me over doubtfully, and the language of his eyes was what I heard.

"We have nothing for you," they were saying, mutely. Though the scornful words were unspoken, I heard them hissing behind his lips.

"I wish to publish a book, at once," I heard myself saying. "I have the manuscript with me."

He laughed — a low, taunting, scornful laugh, and once more looked me over, from head to foot. That was his answer.

At the same instant I saw him dodge, and spring back out of my reach. I did

not know that I had lifted my hand, until it came down with a crash upon the show-case.

As I was turning away, a tall, handsome man of the aristocrat-type, entered the store and greeted me courteously. Then he turned to the clerk.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

I went forward to meet him, instinctively attracted to him. He was a gentleman, of the born kind. His sensitive face was fair and delicate, and exquisitely refined in feature. In his eyes was a glorified look, as if they had seen heaven. I learned, afterward, that their divine radiance was the light of a great love.

"What is the matter?" he repeated.

"A poor devil of an author, of the delirium-tremens type," I heard the clerk whisper, in aside.

The man did not smile. He only looked at me with his radiant eyes.

"I wish to publish a book. I have the manuscript with me," I repeated, helplessly.

He took the manuscript in his soft, white, gentle hands.

"If you will leave this with me," he said, "our readers shall judge of its merits. We are over-supplied with manuscripts, just now, however. Can you give us a month?"

"A—month?" I repeated, incredulously.

He looked at me compassionately—at me; not, as his clerk's hard eyes had looked, over me.

"Ah!" he said, involuntarily. Then, with a sudden kindly smile, "we will make the month a week."

That week of waiting! I could never have endured it——

Save for—Nan!

XI.

As I re-entered the publishing-house, a week later, the dapper clerk greeted me with a respectful bow.

"I was told to show you upstairs," he said.

I followed him into the elevator, out of it again, through aisles enclosed in solid walls of books, toward a room in the rear of the building. On the threshold the clerk paused, knocking at the half-open door.

"Come in," said a voice I recognized.

The clerk stood back respectfully. I entered the room. The owner of the familiar voice stepped forward with outstretched hand.

"Mr. ——?" he inquired.

"Von Vost," I responded.

"A good name, a noble name," exclaimed an old man seated at a table in the centre of the room. "And there's something in a name, Shakespeare notwithstanding. I'd avow it to his ghost. And *à propos*, let me be the first to congratulate you not only on your name, but upon your work. It is original, striking, stupendous—a work of genius, my boy, a work of genius."

"Mr. Castleman, our senior member—familiarly known as the Enthusiast," explained my friend, with a smile. "Our general autocrat, Mr. Grifton, otherwise known as the Cynic. Last and least, myself—distinguished, in the firm, as the Happy Medium; but known elsewhere by the family name of —Harold."

"When will my book be published?" I asked, curtly. Their easy persiflage embarrassed me. I felt ill at ease, out of place, at

a disadvantage. I resented the logical inference that the advantage was on their side.

"The proverbial impatience of youthful authors," groaned the Cynic. "Not so fast, young man. There are several questions to be discussed before the matter of publication can be considered at all."

"It is a work of genius," repeated the senior member, with a thump on the table. "After the reports of our readers, I sat up all night to read it. You'd freeze the fires of Dante's 'Inferno,' Grifton, with that confoundedly cold, cautious, critical manner of yours. Why not speak out, and confess to the lad that you're big D'd glad to publish his book? If you're not, I am, by the Immortals!"

"I believe," said Grifton, appealing to Harold, "that I am the business manager?"

"Business be hanged!" cried the Enthu-

siast. "*I*"—with significant emphasis—"*I* have a brain which comprehends, a soul which sympathizes with, a heart which beats in unison with, genius."

Harold rose with a smile—Harold, my friend. Even then, when I had seen him only twice, had felt the cordial pressure of his hand but once, the first man, the last man, I have called—my friend.

"My dear Enthusiast," he said, "I move that you and I desert the field, and leave it to the Cynic, and genius."

"Not for Dickens!" responded the addressed, with emphasis, "until I have drunk confusion to the one and success to the other, in old port I brought with me to-day, in honor of this occasion!"

I felt no elation at the tribute; the blood did not quicken in my veins; my heart throbbed no whit faster.

"I am glad that my book pleases you," I said, "inasmuch as its publication is thus insured. Otherwise your praises are nothing to me. My ambition is not a personal one—I—I——"

The words of passionate allegiance to my cause which I had fain uttered, faltered on my lips. The fumes of the rare old wine in my nostrils, its flavor in my mouth, its glow in my veins—the costly glass in my hand, so fragile that a breath might break it—the luxurious room with its inlaid floor, its dusky rugs, its languorous chairs, its handsome decorations—above all, the proximity not as superiors, but as equals, of these cultured, courteous gentlemen, gave me my first insight into the charm, the fascination, the sensuous spell, the temptation, of wealth and all that the golden term implies.

Did I swerve, for one brief instant, from

the path that I had sworn to tread? Did I falter, in the moment of temptation, in my allegiance to my cause?

If I did, my weakness was short-lived. Even in that instant, all the wrong, the injustice, the hopeless struggle, the bitter misery of poverty, flashed before me. As the events of a lifetime are recalled in the drowning man's last moment of consciousness, so every horrible phase of poverty that I had ever seen or heard of, flashed simultaneously, yet clearly, before my mental eyes.

With an oath, I hurled down the glass whose siren-draught, in that moment of madness, had tempted me to treachery. It shattered into a thousand pieces, which gleamed like chips of diamonds on the floor. The wine trickled in a glowing stream to one of the costly rugs, and settled in a pool

beside it, ruddy and warm with the life-blood of the poor whose bruised feet tread the wine-press that the sated lips of the rich may drink and drain. I met with defiant eyes the eyes of the men before me. The cold surprise of the Cynic, the simple consternation of the Enthusiast—not even the tender pity in Harold's shining eyes, hushed my wild words.

"I hate you," I hissed behind clenched teeth. "I hate your rich old wine, your delicate glasses, your sensuous surroundings. I hate everything that they, even as I hate everyone that you, represent. If you have read my book, you know what I am. If you do not know, I will tell you. I am one sworn by the death of Christ and the death of Christ's creature, to hunt you down, to track you to your gilded palaces, to overthrow your thrones, to tear away your crowns, to

make a mock of your vaunted power—to hurl you down, down, down, to hunger and cold and nakedness!—to brand your wives as the slaves of the poor who have been their servants, to force your daughters into the arms of the men whom the hems of their dainty garments now scorn to brush. Revenge first, Reform after! And as I have sworn, so the great masses I represent habe sworn with me. I am one, they are millions! Be warned! be warned! *The masses against the classes!* this is our war-cry. Our arms are rapine and murder! Our flag, the black flag of death!"

As I dashed from the room and groped blindly through the book-shadowed aisles beyond it, the Enthusiast's voice floated to me.

"I told you he was a genius," he cried, triumphantly, "but," with gentle regret, "that prime old port——"

"If genius is indeed insanity, I admit the genius," responded the Cynic. "He's madder than a March hare."

"Delirium tremens! Didn't I say so?" chuckled the eaves-dropping clerk.

Only one voice was silent. He alone said no word against me—Harold, my friend! my friend!

XII.

Nan came in upon me as I was packing my last poor possession into my shabby satchel, some hours later. When she saw what I was doing, she drew a quick, sharp, sobbing breath, and pressed her hand to her breast.

"You're goin' away—" she gasped, "goin' away?"

I stared at her stupidly. For a moment I had forgotten that she had a claim upon me. In that moment her mother appeared in the doorway.

"Goin' away?" she repeated. "Not till I've had a word wi' my fine gentleman. I've been drunk, onct, or twict, but not blind drunk. Put that in yer pipe, an'

smoke it. Wot about my girl, I say? Wot about my girl?"

"Mother!" cried Nan, and hid her face in her hands.

From the street below sounded the rattle of wheels, the snap of whips, the cries of a passing vender. On the stairs a child screamed lustily. In the adjoining room a drunkard was beating his wife. The thud of the blows reached us, and her stifled sobs and entreaties. Yet, though my ear heard all, I was conscious only of one soft sound, the sound of Nan's true heart, beating.

"Will you come with me?" I asked her.

I did not wait for her answer. Her radiant face foretold it. She followed me, dog-like, as, without a word, I strode from the squalid room.

Her mother's voice followed us.

"Make him marry yer, Nan," she cried.

"No traipsin' back ter me wi' his brat at yer breast. Make him marry yer."

"Do you wish me to marry you?" I asked, as we walked from the door.

"I—I'd like ter have it ter say as I'm an honest woman," she faltered. "If—if——"

I understood the womanly yearning, the yearning of potential motherhood, that the faltering words failed to express.

"You shall be an honest woman," I said. "I will get the license, and we will be married to-day."

"To-day?" she echoed.

She scowled down at her poor gown; then tore off her hat, and twirled it about on her hand childishly, walking bareheaded by my side.

"I hain't got no weddin' dress, nor no cake, nor — nor nuthin!" she objected. "When I marry, I want to be married sty-

lish, like Mamie Murphy married Joe Cassidy. They was married to church, an' had cake an' whiskey, an' dancin' all night; an' she had four dresses an' a store-trimmed hat. I—I hain't got nuthin'."

We were approaching a large shop, I pressed a roll of bills into her hand.

"Buy all that you need, here," I said. "In the meantime, I will go for the license. I shall be back with it within an hour."

God knows that I meant to keep my promise! Yet I failed it—poor Nan, poor Nan!

XIII.

My impulse to flee from the city, the temptation of whose wealth I had not been strong enough to resist, had been a passionate one. Now that my blood was cool, I asked myself where I—I and Nan—were going? My heart turned to the country—God's garden, whose flowers bloom alike for rich and poor. In the still green fields, the pure fresh air, the soothing hush and restful isolation, my storm-tossed soul would regain calm and peace. I would have no more of men-built cities. It is the chill of the marble palace, the shadow of the brownstone mansion, that falls upon the poor man's hovel with blight of death. In the country the sun is bright and warm alike on

manse and cottage. Tolstoi is right. To guide the plough, to plant the ground, to foster the seed, to reap the harvest—this is the work for men. Leave the town pursuits to the gentlemen. The exotic flourishes in the hot-house, where the field-bloom fades and dies.

As for my book, I was content. So help me God—I had had no thought of personal gain, either of gold or fame, in writing it! I had written what I had to write, I had insured its publication. My duty was done. Moreover, I knew that the book would be well cared for. I had left it in Harold's hands.

Walking down toward City Hall for my marriage license, I noticed a dense crowd gathering in one of the down-town squares.

"What's up?" I asked a fellow-bystander.

"The dander of the masses, evidently," he

replied. "I'm here to report the speeches—yonder fellows—pointing to an armed police-squad filing toward the square—"to re*tort* them, with clubs and pistols. Better keep out of the row."

He was a fresh-faced, blue-eyed young fellow, of compact, powerful physique. His cap was pushed well back on his head, and I could not but notice his splendid forehead, high, full and broad, and smooth and white as a girl's. It was framed in a curly tangle of golden hair. His ready, boyish smile was irresistible. My first impression of him, which proved a correct one, was that he carried life, like his cap, jauntily.

"I like rows," I said to him.

"So do I," he laughed. "I live by them. The bigger the row the bigger my salary. I expect to be rolling in wealth to-morrow."

"Does literary work pay?" I asked him, with sudden interest.

"No," he answered, with a mischievous twinkle in his blue eyes, "but newspaper-work does—the only work, by the way, of which as much may be said, if we are to take the word of these strikers. What do you think of their case?"

"I—I don't know anything about it," I stammered, shamefacedly. I could not explain to him why for the last fortnight I had lived in a world apart.

"Jerusalem!" he exclaimed. "Then you don't know anything about me either. If you'd read the papers, you'd have seen my mark on the 'Labor versus Capital' page, every day for the last week. I'm Frank Noble—not half a bad name, is it? This is the eighth day of the greatest labor strike on American record. The Union is backing

it. That's one of the Union officers now, speechifying. I can't catch a word, but I'll fill a column with what he ought to be saying, if he isn't. Read to-morrow's 'Herald' —but no, you don't read the papers, do you?"

"I do," I cried. "Every man reads them, who has eyes, and a brain behind them. But for the last fortnight I have read, seen, heard nothing. I—I——"

I interrupted myself with a start of keen surprise. The charm of the frank blue eyes, of the sunny boyish smile, had all but betrayed me into confiding in him. He noticed my embarrassment, and delicately changed the subject. I think he entertained a sudden suspicion that my newspaperless fortnight had been passed in jail.

"Poor devils!" he exclaimed, indicating the mass of unwashed, unshaved, shabbily-

clad, desperate-faced men crowding and jostling each other in front of the platform. "I am sorry for them, and hope they may get their rights. As to their wrongs, I wonder if some of them are not of their own making? I've racketed about the world with eyes wide open, for thirteen years—ran away with a circus when I was eleven, and haven't turned the quarter-century corner yet, and I've never yet seen a case of real destitution that the big D of Drink wasn't at the bottom of it. If these Union orators would turn their socialistic harangues into temperance lectures, I believe that the first step toward the Anti-Poverty millennium would be scaled."

"You are right, and wrong!" I answered. "Temperance would indeed be a blow under which Poverty would stagger, but so would the poor. Only the legs of the poor fail

them in drunkenness; their hearts and souls would fail in sobriety! The poor drink, and forget; they drink, and dream; they drink, and hope; they drink, and exult! When you wrest the glass from their lips, you wrest from their lives, with it, all that makes the difference between a man's life and brute-existence. And the poor man's life is a brute-existence. Curses upon the creators of it!"

"You mean the rich?"

"I mean the rich."

"Then you are really a socialist? I took you for an outsider. What are your name and trade—or profession, is it? You look like a toiler, and talk like a dreamer. You'll write up splendidly."

He whipped out his book and pencil. I watched him proudly, defiantly, as he jotted down my answer.

"I am Otho Wolfgang von Vost, Anarchist!" I said. "In a month or two, you, your newspapers, will have heard more of me."

As with eager interest he pressed me for an explanation of my mysterious words, a sullen roar from the crowd interrupted us. Toward the platform from which half a dozen excited speakers were now shouting anarchical threats, the armed police were forcing their way. As the captain of the squad mounted the stand, one of the speakers drew and cocked a revolver.

The deed, I believe, was one of mere bravado, but it acted upon the crowd like flame upon dry wood. There were oaths, and threats, and screams of rage, and a general drawing of knives and pistols. In a second, the police had opened fire. To do them justice, they shot in the air, but the

effect was as deadly as if they had aimed at hearts. The maddened mob retaliated. There was a babel of shrieks and curses, a hissing shower of bullets—then, as it seemed to me, a surge of the whole dense crowd upon me. I threw out my arms, and cried that I was stifling, strangling. A sting in my left breast, a choking gurgle in my throat, silenced me. A death-like faintness swept like a chill wave over me. I felt myself sinking down, down, into a yawning fathomless pit of darkness——

I knew no more.

XIV.

A PERIOD of hell ensued.

When I woke from my swoon, the pit was dark no longer, it was burning, blazing, blinding—a vortex of seething fire. I strove to cry out and struggle, as the red flames wreathed and lapped me, but from my scorched lips no sound issued, and weights of red-hot iron bound my limbs. Demon-faces leered at me, framed in fire; demon-voices mocked me from the hissing flames. With one mighty wrench, awful as the death-wrench of soul from body, I broke from my fiery gyves, and dashed out—out—out——

O God! the death-like cold, the grave-like darkness! less awful the flames and glare of the fiery pit.

Then once more the helpless sinking into the dark depths of unconsciousness. And thus, over and over, again and again.

When I awoke from my delirium, I found myself in the ward of a hospital, with rows of white pallets facing me, and bounding me on either side. Between every two beds was a large window. The curtains were raised, and the sunlight flickered on the white counterpanes, and over the clean wood-floor. The doctors, three in number, one old and two young ones, were making their rounds. A white-capped nurse accompanied them.

The faces upon the pillows were of all types, young and old, fair and ugly, good and bad, refined and brutal. Two especially attracted my attention. They were sharp contrasts. One was the face of a youth returning to life from the shadow of death; one the face of an old man, upon which the

awful shadow was deepening. I saw it on his damp forehead, on his pinched gray features, in his staring, glassy eyes. Even as I looked, the death-rattle sounded in his throat. He gurgled, gasped, and passed away; without a word, without a sign, without the touch or glance or voice of a human fellow-creature to bid him God-speed on Death's unknown way. The doctors crossed to his bedside, felt his pulse, and turned away. The nurse drew a screen around his bed. The face of the young man I have mentioned blanched and quivered. He had a heart—the curse of youth and innocence! There was a tear on my own cheek, but my eyes were weak only, not pitiful. Poverty turns the heart to stone—and the soul to flesh!

The doctors reached me, and the nurse. The men-nurses stood in a group outside the door, discussing with the warden the case of

one of the ward, whose complaints against the hospital had reached the newspapers. The white-capped nurse brushed the hair away from my forehead, with gentle hand. I noticed her touch, because I had dreaded it. I had seen a man across the aisle flinch, heard him cry out, under it. But then it had not been gentle. He was old, and ugly.

I drifted into a deep, sweet, natural sleep, the sleep of utter exhaustion. I awoke in a private room in the hospital, with Harold's tender face bending over me. The tears welled from my eyes as I recognized him. He took my hand in a strong, close clasp.

"Thank God, old fellow!" I heard him murmur.

I turned my face to the wall, and wept in silence. The reverent words had touched me. God is—Who? Thank Him for what? my doubting soul questioned. Yet in those

silent tears, I think that both my faith and my thanksgiving were offered, for the first time, to the Most High.

"Do not try to talk," Harold said, as I attempted to speak. "I will tell you everything, if you are quiet; but nurse, here, says that I must go, if I excite you. And above all other wilful women, we all know that nurses must have their way."

I looked up with a smile that died in a shudder. The ward nurse had followed me to my room. I remembered the old man opposite, and his cry of pain under her untender hands. Her caressing smile could not make me forget it. I turned my face from her.

"Go away!" I said; and even that slight effort made me faint.

As in a dream, I heard Harold's courteous apologies, and her fretful expostulations. When the door had opened and shut behind

her, I reopened my eyes with a smile. Harold understood.

"You do not like her?" he asked. "You shall have a man-nurse."

I pressed his hand, and mustered all my strength for a further effort.

"Tell me," I began; then my weak voice failed. But his fine intuition needed no spoken question. He bathed my brow, and forced a teaspoonful of brandy between my chill lips. As I revived, he spoke.

"You were shot at the mass-meeting," he said. "The ball lodged too near your heart for the doctors to probe for it. When you recover your strength, it will not matter, but at present any effort might give it a push in a fatal direction. Therefore you must be quite passive for some days yet. You were brought to the hospital with a dozen other wounded, but identified, later, by a bright

young journalist, through whom I discovered your whereabouts. He has visited you every day since your accident, and has been writing you up, as he calls it, with a pen steeped in youthful enthusiasm. You are now a famous author, you know. Your accident dates, you will be surprised to hear, nearly nine weeks back. Your long high fever was followed by an alarming stupor of exhaustion, but the doctors' permission to remove you from the ward was a tacit assurance of your recovery. All you need now is patience. Happy hopes should speed your convalescence. The life that lies before you is a far brighter and more beautiful one than the life that lies behind. Your work is a success, social, literary, and financial. I tell you this, in the belief that pleasant news is only healthfully exciting. When you left us so unceremoniously upon

the occasion of your call at the office, I took your book into my own hands, rushing its publication, as the strikes made such a work upon the labor-question opportune. The result has more than fulfilled my highest hopes. I think you will find, upon investigation, that we have done justly, even generously, by you. Now shut your eyes, and go to sleep. To-morrow I will tell you more. Lie still! Don't try to speak! My God, man, you will kill yourself! Lie back! I say! Lie back!"

He had spoken two words which were branded in torturing fire before my eyes, upon my brain, within my heart. All that he had said before them, all that he had said after them, was as nothing. I knew neither that my life was in danger, nor that I was a famous author. I knew only that I had been lying there, a powerless, insensate log,

for nine long weeks. Nine weeks of days, nine weeks of nights—and Nan, poor, loving, trusting, forsaken Nan—

"Nan!" I screamed, wildly.

"Hush!" he cried. "A woman named Nan? I will find her for you."

I strove to speak. Suddenly I choked and gurgled. A gush of something warm and red welled from my lips.

Then a terrible agony convulsed me. An iron hand clutched my racked heart, crushing it, rending it.

"Nan! Nan!" I heard a wild voice crying.

A wave of death-like pain and faintness engulfed me. As it bore me downward, submerging me in its chill, dark depths, I heard the voice still crying—

"Nan! Nan! Nan!"

XV.

Deep down into the valley of Death I went, then. It was only by a miracle that I regained the heights of life and health, they told me later.

"A miracle of youth and strength," said the doctor.

"A miracle of God," said the priest.

Then I wondered which was right. Now I know that both were wrong. It was a miracle of the devil.

A month later, I was out of the hospital; wasted and pale, weaker constitutionally, for my accident, since warned that any violent emotion might cause my death; yet feeling almost my old self, physically.

Physically, yes; but mentally—my God!

No damned soul in hell suffered more diabolical torments than I, through the long, weary, restless days and nights of convalescence, while my weakness withheld me from beginning my search for Nan. It was not that I loved the girl with the love with which a man loves one woman, and one only, in his life. It was—but what words can I use, to make you understand me? She was not to me simply Nan the girl, the woman; but rather the human feminine embodiment of the piteous cause to which my life was consecrated. She was Poverty, she was Weakness, she was Want, she was Ignorance, she was Helplessness, she was Slavery: she was, in short, the incarnate Sacrifice, Martyr, Victim of evil social conditions, the living holocaust of shameful social forces, to whose destruction my life was sworn!

And to her, thus, as I regarded her, I, her

sworn upholder, defender, avenger, had done the cruellest of wrongs—smitten her lower than wealth or power or pride or oppression had ever smitten her. These, at least, had left her innocent. I had betrayed her, soul and flesh, to sin.

Well I knew it, knowing her, knowing her life—her irrevocable past, her inevitable future! Harold and Frank and I talked it over and over, day after day, as I tossed restlessly to and fro on my hospital bed. Harold, in his gentle, generous way, hoped for the best, and was confident, until a personal search proved otherwise, that she had returned to her home and mother. But Frank, wiser in his youthful generation than Harold in his, agreed with me that the betrayed, deserted girl, comely with the comeliness born of youth and animal health and vigor, would not escape temptation, to which,

in her despair, her shame, her helplessness, and the recklessness of her untutored passionate nature, she would succumb perforce, if, as Frank suggested, she had not already sought refuge in the river. But this suggestion I could not entertain. I could have found it in my heart to wish that it might be so; but in my soul, I knew it was not. Nan lived still. Something told me this. But where?—and O God! how?

I need not say that I had never been a religious man. I had not been even a moral one, as the conventional cant of morals goes. Nevertheless, as a matter of taste, perhaps, since not of morals, my personal life had been a clean one. I had lived life passionately; but it is the most narrow, the most gross, the most degrading of mistakes, to hold that passion is necessarily of the flesh, and that all men are slaves to it. Passion is the

strongest sentiment, emotion, desire—call it what you will—humanity knows, yes!—but the passion of the senses is its lowest and weakest, and because its lowest and weakest, its commonest phase. The passion of the heart, the passion of the mind, the passion of the soul, are strongest, even as they are highest. What is Religion, but the passion of the human for the divine? What is Philanthrophy, but passion for humanity? What is Patriotism, but passion for country? What is Martyrdom, but passion for self-sacrifice? What is Heroism, but the passion for risk, strife, conquest? What is Genius, but passion for science and art? All great men have been men of strong passions—passions of soul or mind. Love, the heart-passion, is the purest, highest, noblest of all passions. But as for the flesh-passion, simple and singly —faugh! Leave brute instincts to the brute.

As I have said, I had lived at once a clean life, and a passionate one. The passion kindled in my childhood, which had flamed in my boyhood, been fanned to fire in my manhood, was the passion inherited from my father and fostered by him—the passion for "Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!" The concentrated, commingled forces of soul and mind and heart and body, had all alike been turned in this one direction. This is why I had felt no temptation toward an unclean life. Had I been tempted, I should have yielded, holding, as I have said, no conventional tenets as to moral right and wrong. As to love, I did not know it. Nan was the first woman who had ever touched me; but her touch, I knew, instinctively, was only the lightest flick of the wing of love, in its riotous infancy. The strong, close fold of love's full-grown pinions I might, or might not,

live to know; but Nan would never wield them.

In my weakness and recklessness, I revealed my whole heart, talking my thoughts out wildly, to the two who listened. I think that Harold understood me, but Frank did not. In his boyish conception, love was love, and indifference, indifference; he realized no subtle grades between. In spite of his youthful enthusiasms, he was a realist rather than an idealist; made such through the daring spirit of adventure which had led him to investigate the shadowed byways of life as well as its shining highways. Knowledge of life's darker phases, however, had left no stain on his clean soul. Like myself, he was a man of clean tastes, rather than of clean morals; and so-called immorality in others neither surprised nor repelled him. He accepted it simply as a

common, if unlovely, feature of human existence.

Therefore, it was without pang of conscience that I entrusted to him the search from which my invalid helplessness debarred me—the search for Nan in the sphere wherein, sooner or later, I felt sure we would find her. The girl's face as her mother's taunt, "No traipsin' back to me wi' his brat at yer breast," had followed us, was ever befyre me. Come what would, Nan would never go back to her, a nameless outcast. Death, hell itself, were preferable.

Frank was, as he said himself, an able "slummer." He was no novice in the rôle, his journalistic career having been more or less characterized by "sensations," as the term has it, in the slum-line; and his search for Nan was as thorough and exhaustive as I myself could have made. That he had

never seen her personally, was, of course, a disadvantage; but I had a cheap tintype of her for which she had sat for me specially, I believe, poor girl, which would serve to identify her; and moreover, her trick of gait, not marked enough to amount to a limp, yet too pronounced a peculiarity to escape an eye forewarned, would alone insure his recognition of her, should he cross her path.

But he failed to cross it, even as I failed, later; though by dawn and noon and midnight we searched the haunts where the girls of the pavement congregate. We set the officers of the force to hunt her. We set the sleuth-hounds of her own sex and social condition on her track. All to no avail. From hall and dive and rum-hole and den and cellar, we turned to the sweating-shops, the factories, the tenements. In last forlorn hope, I sought her mother. She was drunk, as

usual. When I told her the truth, she wept some maudlin tears. Then a delirium of anger took possession of her.

"It's a lie!" she yelled. "Yer brought her ter shame, an' killed her ter git rid of her. My Nan's dead! My Nan's murdered! Nan, Nan, Nan——"

Her wild shrieks died in sobs, as I left her, prostrated by grief and liquor. Nevertheless, for the first time, I respected her. She believed what she said, and the coarse, bloated, unsexed breast shrined the heart of a woman and mother.

"If Nan had known as much, she would have come back to her," I thought, miserably.

But she had not known, and she had not gone back.

I relinquished the vain search.

XVI.

It was during the restless days of my convalescence that Harold, seated by my bedside, his gentle hand in mine, told me of his love. It was a great love, deep and strong as his man's heart, yet pure with an angelic purity, tender with a tenderness surpassing woman's. He had never told her of it. She was happy in her peaceful girlish life—he would not disturb its dream. He did not tell me her name. She was "her," the one, the only one the world held for him. His voice was low and reverent as he talked of her, like the voice of one in prayer.

"She is so pure, so shy," he said, "a word, a touch would kill her. I looked at her once, only once, with the lover's eyes,

and I saw her start and shrink and tremble, while the vestal blood surged to her cheek, and her shy eyes filled with startled tears. She knew not why. She is like a white rose, veiling her sweet heart from the zephyr in whose warm breath she feels the presage of the coming, fierce simoom. Sometimes I doubt if I shall ever reach her. How shall my feet steal near her? And yet she is a woman—woman, God's gift to man. Sometime, somehow, she will learn the woman's lesson—the lesson of surrender, by sweet Love taught.

"O, Otho! to be her teacher! to see her learn the lesson! She will come to its pages with wayward eyes, and wilful pouting mouth, as a child goes to its book. Then her eyes will drop, and her soft mouth tremble. She will turn, and flee in fear, but Love's voice will recall her. It will be gen-

tle, yet resolute, masterful. She will resist, then pause, then—obey! With burning cheeks fanned by her veiled eyes' lashes, she will return, unseeing that Love's open arms await her. Into them she will go, unheeding; and when they close around her she will struggle, and tremble, and—yield. The surprise, the fear, the shame of yielding will overwhelm her. She will lie quite passive, faint, bewildered, helpless, in Love's embrace. But little by little, her woman-heart will kindle. Her calm white breast will glow and quicken; her soft white arms will cling close, closer; her sweet red lips will yield responsive kisses. Stay! Love's holy veil must not be lifted. God's angels fend it with their strong white wings."

Thus spoke the heart of the man. Then spoke the heart of the gentleman. The voice was a revelation to me. The man has

the brand of the brute upon him; the gentleman, nature's gentleman, I mean, the mark of the god.

"These women! these women!" he cried, "who come to us, at our unworthy bidding, their hearts, like sweet white flowers, in their hands. Our rude hands bruise and rend them. Even our caress hurts. They shrink and wilt beneath its passion, like lilies in fierce sun. They are so fair, so pure, so tender. Love should fold like angel-wing around them. Instead it swoops like hawk, on wings of flame. They yield, we claim, so much—we hold so little! Hot lips, to sear with kisses; fierce arms, to crush, caressing! and after, what? What for the pure true hearts, what for the faithful souls, what for the lives' sweet service? The title of wife—children to the breast—for our own pride and pleasure. But what

for their sakes? Nothing! They are ours! No longer their own, no longer themselves, even; but only one with us! They have no claims, no independent rights. We are Grand Moguls; they our harem-pets. Soft couches, which we share; scents, to make them more sweet; jewels to deck their beauty for our eyes; feasts, whereat they serve—all these we give with generous hand! But let their lonely souls plead guidance on God's way—their pure heart-cry, '*Fidelitas!*' challenge ours—their fettered minds claim freedom—ah! for the bread they hunger we give stones, which hurt the more because hurled with a kiss!"

Then back to the personal note, the heart of the man, love-hungry, lifting its cry anew.

"Sweetheart! Wife! Mother! What would life be without her? Where would

be youth's ideals, man's inspiration and reward? The fair young girl, the tender, faithful woman—the home, earth's heaven, of which man is the god! O, Otho, the home, the home! I yearn for it, I pray for it. I shut my eyes and dream that it is mine. I feel my tired feet hastening as they near it, I see the home-light shining at the window, the home-door set ajar. I see her waiting, smiling on the threshold, I hear her gentle greeting, I feel her kiss of welcome on my lips. I follow her within, to the home-hearthstone. The great chair waits; she nestles by my side. My racked brow knows her sweet lips' benediction. Her soft palms feel like snow-flakes, light and cool. Mayhap she whispers low a shy, sweet secret. Toward us, God-sent from heaven, a wee angel is on flight. O, little woman, love, wife, home-maker, mother!

how long, how long before my dream comes true?"

Then, with a lover's fond, fatuous recurrence, back to her!

"She is so fair—so fair and sweet and tender. As soft clouds dapple heaven, dreams brood within her eyes. She is not gay, not light, but sweetly serious. She prays, and thinks, and builds celestial castles, dreaming them founded on eternal rock. Her sight is fixed on visions; she is an idealist—of realities! Her visions, like yours, are of human and social millenniums whose like this age will never live to see. You must meet her some day, Otho. You will suit each other, and yet—you will not understand her. She hears of sin and evil, and dreams she knows their meaning. You must not take her at her word. She is innocence, and she mistakes herself for knowl-

edge. The mistake is perilous, for her. Of late, a chill fear haunts me lest her dreams be rudely wakened, her innocence blasted by a breath whose flame will kill! I watch—she does not see me. I wait—she does not know. Some day, my love will break its bonds and claim her. O, Otho, my heart trembles! I feel in premonition, Hope's death, fruitless Love's pain!"

A shadow dimmed his love-illumined eyes. His face was suddenly wan with a great sadness. I could not reassure him. I shared his premonition. Some intuition told me that he would lose her.

It did not tell me, or, I call God to witness that I had spared him—that his loss would come through me.

XVII.

As Harold had foretold, I went from the hospital into a changed, if not new, world. I was now a famous man. My name was on all tongues, in every newspaper. I saw my book displayed in the shop-windows, and standing open on the news-stands. Everywhere, immense advertisements of it met my eyes. Moreover, through it, I had what seemed to me unlimited wealth at my command. But as yet, my personal life had changed no whit. I was still the obscure dreamer, the social recluse. Yet both great gain and loss had come to me. Harold and Frank were gained, indeed; but ah, the loss of Nan!

As my vain search ended, there came a

change, due somewhat to Harold's influence, but more to my own restlessness, I think. I emerged from my hermit's cell, from which both press and public alike called me—and surrendered myself to Harold's hands. His first act was to take me to his tailor; his second, to dine me at his club. When I had once stood a man among gentlemen, on equal social footing, the sequence followed naturally enough. From the club to the home, the public dinner to the private table, was the social evolution of but a day. I was dined, and wined, and fêted, day and night. The gentlemen presented me, the ladies received me. I clasped white hands, which once had scorned their alms to me—sat side by side with queens I had dared not serve! The famous author became the social lion. I accepted the rôle but not without a protest, and caused an occasional

panic by indulging in a growl. When Harold felt me chafing in my cage, he let me loose for a few days, and I returned more docile for my freedom. There is a lesson in this confession, for those who care to learn it.

I think my character is a complex one. Impulsive at times, even to the verge of folly, as even so much of my narration has already shown, I was, at other times, the slowest, the least impetuous, the most apathetic of men. For example, my book. Day after day, for unproductive years, I had unconsciously accumulated, assimilated, the impressions, thoughts, and passions recorded on its pages, later, with pen of white-hot flame. So with me now. I took my part in the social farce like any other player. Nevertheless, the day would come when, the mask cast off, I would stand forth no longer

the showman's puppet, but the human man, with burning heart and soul. I knew it. I think Harold knew it. He watched me closely; sometimes, I fancied, nervously. But his fear was neither for himself nor others, but only for myself. His sensitiveness was so exquisite, his sympathy so tender, his manly love so true, that he shrunk in personal pain when, by chance or accident, he exposed me to sights and sounds that, knowing me as he did, he knew must stab to my soul's core. But born and bred to the gold and purple—even he could not conceive the death-like pang of Poverty's heart, brought, for the first time, face to face with Wealth, Pomp, Power. It is the stab under which the demons writhe, gazing from hell at heaven. It is not Envy; it is not even Desire. It is simply—Knowledge.

I cannot express the impression my initia-

tion into the beautiful world of pleasure made upon me. "Everything has two sides," says the old saw; and I, who had hated wealth, pride, power, looking at them from the outside, now viewed them from within. Did I hate them still? Yes, a thousand times yes—the more bitterly because, perforce, at the same time I loved them!

Aye, I stand confessed a traitor. I yielded to their spell, succumbed to their lure, drained thirstily, exultantly, of the siren-cup I should have spurned and shattered.

"Life is real; life is earnest," sings the poet; but he sings of the toiling world without the world of pleasure, not of the dwellers within its golden gates. To these life is not real, not earnest; not life at all, as great souls, high minds, warm hearts, live it. The

children of pleasure live the life of the flesh alone, the highest life of the flesh—not gross, not coarse, not always sensual, even; but from cradle to grave, from conception to dissolution, ideally, exquisitely sensuous. If the soul, the mind, the heart are starved, the flesh, the senses, are satiated. Beauty for the eyes, music for the ears, sweets for the taste, fragrance for the smell, softness and warmth, and every sensuous joy the flesh can know for the feeling. O God! O God! and the horrible sights, the dreadful sounds, the sickening stenches, the hunger and thirst, the cold and nakedness, the manifold agonies of the human world about them!

In the world of pleasure the women one and all are beautiful, with a beauty independent of nature's rarest dower. If natural beauty exist, its germ is developed to seed, its seed to bud, its bud to flower; if it

exist not, it is substituted by a trick of expression which transforms the plain face like a lustrous veil—an art of grace, a charm of manner, a fascination of speech, a brilliancy of accomplishment, a lure of toilette, a foil of environment, which arrest and hold one spell-bound with the power of beauty itself.

Beautiful women, what do you make of your men? Not saints, not heroes, not even poets, as true poets go! Not faithful husbands, not noble fathers, not filial sons. No, but lovers! always lovers, lovers! As wine is to the blood, so love is to the flesh. It warms, and thrills, and quickens. Without wine, where were the wit of the feast? Without love, where the after-pleasure? Where is the harm? There is no sin in soft looks, fond words, caressing touches? No, not of the eye, or lip, or hand, perhaps—but what of the soul behind them? Look deep

within, as God's eyes look, and see your sin, O whited sepulchres!

I will be just and honest. In the world of pleasure are Virtue and Justice, Generosity, Charity, Pity, Unselfishness, Heroism, Sacrifice. There is Temperance in men; there is Purity in women. There are Duty, Honor, Truth, and faithful Love. But these are the exceptions, not the rule. I say it boldly. God's temples lift His cross at the Hill-corners. Man's mansions lift a hundred crowns, between!

XVIII.

The revulsion of feeling I experienced upon my introduction into the world of the rich and great, after my life-long sojourn with the poor and suffering, explains, I think, the torpor and apathy that followed. I was dazed, mentally and spiritually. Like a ship adrift on unknown waters, I had to take my bearings —a slower process humanly than nautically.

After all, the soul and mind fight against heavy odds in this human life: their foe, the flesh, is mighty. I, whose soul well knew the monopoly of wealth, whose bitter fruit is the ever-deepening degradation, soul and body, of the poor—to be the sin that cries to God Himself for vengeance; I, whose mental eyes, piercing the illusions, the pretences, the

deceptions of fashionable life, saw beneath the beautiful velvet-skinned fruit, the worm that gnaws its core; even I—I say, found mind and spirit tempted, trammelled, enslaved by the flesh whose rapturous potentialities were a perilous revelation to me. I lounged on soft couches, and in cushioned carriages: I tasted of sybarite dishes, drank deep of priceless vintages; dreamed sensuous dreams, inhaling the scented smoke of Orient weeds. I revelled in sweet music, in the low, trained voices of ladies; while my eyes feasted on the beauty of their nude white throats and arms. I turned from the tinted lamps, and found the street lamps lurid; I stepped from the mansion's velvets, and felt the street stones hard. All this, as I have said, in apathetic unrealization, almost unconsciousness. I awoke with a start. What roused me?

A young, fair, woman-face!

The feast had been a sumptuous one. I had eaten from silver plate, and drunk from priceless crystal. Through banks of odorous flowers we passed to the *salon.* The tinted lights were lowered. Languorous lounges waited. Ladies, with lash-veiled eyes, smiled welcome. Behind the lashes smouldered the flame of siren-fires. The ladies were only women, after all. Their glowing lips, their fragrant breaths, their caressing voices mingled with the glow of the wine, the scent of the flowers, the subdued amorous whisper of unseen violins. I shut my eyes, shuddering softly with sensuous bliss and pleasure, as one yields to the spell and rapture of a passionate love-dream.

When, impelled by some resistless force, I opened my eyes, the scene was changed, transformed. I asked myself if I had slept, if I dreamed still ?

The lowered lights were brilliant; the music was no longer amorous, but only wistful, tender; the languid women sat erect and stately on their cushions; the men, one and all, had leaped to reverent feet; while up the room came floating like a vision, a girl whose white robes trailed like angel-wings.

I heard a quick, deep breath beside me, and turning, looked on Harold. The angel-wings had brushed him as they passed. A gleam of their white radiance still lingered on his face. A flame flashed from his eyes fixed on her! a white flame, burning purely from his pure white soul. The flame of love! A blind man would have recognized it. So help me God, I did not recognize it, then! Blinded I was, to all save that fair vision, as eyes fixed on the sunlight are blinded to the stars!

She was fair and tall and slender. Her

hair was of pale gold, like a veiled sunbeam. Her eyes were blue, gray-shadowed; her lips not red, but pink. Her smile, like her eyes, was shadowed with sweet graveness. Her face was like a lily, its white stained by no blush.

She seemed the rhythm of motion as she passed me. She did not walk—she swayed on her white wings. Their rustle, soft and silken, encompassed her. Her mien was like a sweet, proud, gracious queen's.

I stood spell-bound, and watched as she was greeted; heard her voice, saw her smile, as in a dream. I wakened as her soft hand sought mine, clasped it. I dreamed again—awoke. We were alone.

The dance had opened in the adjacent ball-room. Couples smiled on us, circling by the doors. I caught a glimpse of Harold—smiled, forgot him; forgot all save that she was speaking to me—she!

These were her words:

"You were a great man when you wrote your book. You are, you will be—what? I watched you from afar, with lifted eyes, while your path soared above me. Now, it has sunk to my low level. Therefore I speak. The poor had a champion, the powerless a protector, the wronged a defender and avenger. Where is he? What will they do without him? Wealth and Power have taken all else from them. Shall they be left not even him?

"He eats off gold, and drinks from jewelled goblets, while the poor man drains the death-draught of the rum-shop's poison, and the child sucks dry its starving mother's breast. He rolls by in sumptuous carriages, while the wheels grind the helpless cripple, and the blooded steeds trample the aged under their cruel feet. He dreams on soft down-pillows

while the homeless faint on the street stones, and the sick toss and shriek with anguish on their death-beds of rags and straw. He walks in fine attire, while the daughters of the poor go naked; shameless, because shame-steeped from pauper-cradle to Magdalen-grave. He whiffs rare weeds, and plays with ivory billiards, while opium-den and gaming-table ring with the suicide's shrieks! He basks in the smiles of fair women, while the shop-girl is lured to her ruin, and the girl of the street leaps, cursing, into the river's grave. He drains his cup of pleasure. Its lees—what are they? A death-bed prefiguring hell's worst torments—flaming with God's just vengeance, haunted by demon-spectres, ringing with the everlasting curses of lost souls he might have saved!"

Her voice was as the voice of my own

soul—as the voice of my father, as the voice of the poor, whose cause I had betrayed. I leaped to my feet and shrieked. As the dancers rushed in from the ball-room, I burst into burning words. I know not what I said, but I saw the women pale and shiver. The men—Harold sought to hush me. As well seek to hush the demons shrieking at hell's red mouth.

Then the passion passed, and a gentler spell was on me. My voice grew pleading, tender. I heard myself, as one unseen and distant, repeating my mother's words:

"*Hate loses causes; Love wins them!*"

"*Love wins them!*" I repeated.

And then I heard a single word re-echoing, "Love! Love! Love!"

XIX.

I do not know whence the idea first came to me—perhaps my mother's spirit hovered, whispering, near—but as I spoke those woman-words of hers, a sudden fierce desire to test their truth overwhelmed me. Often as they had recurred to me, their full significance had never before dawned on me. Now, like a lightning flash, it burst upon me, irradiating all that had before been dark. Love was the solution of the unsolved social problem. Love the answer to the unanswered social question! In love alone is the triumph of the socialist's nigh-lost cause!

I looked at the men — the gentlemen — about me.

"Love," I cried, "and wed in honorable marriage the daughters of the poor!"

I looked at the fair proud ladies.

"Love," I pleaded, "not the gentlemen, but the men of the world—the toilers. Into their toil-stained palms put your white hands—lay your fair heads on their rugged bosoms—let their strong rough arms close round you like knights' steel shields. Be their sweethearts first, and their wives after. Bring forth their strong-limbed children. Be mothers to a new, heroic race! The human race is degenerating, for the lack of a new graft on it. The sap of the old stock dwindles, and ebbs to lees and dregs. Mix the crimson blood of the workman with the white breast-milk of the lady, and look to the veins these blend in for virile life and strength. Should the masses wake to their need, they will pounce like wolves on the

classes, draining the blood of the gentlemen, feasting in brutish fury on the ladies' white breasts and limbs. Already wolf-teeth are gnashing. While time is yours, use it wisely. Turn the wolves into lambs by caresses, O fair woman-arms and hands!"

I said far more, but what, I know not. My passion, like a great wave, engulfed me. When I re-rose to the surface of consciousness, I was sounding the personal note.

"The time," I was saying, "for words and preaching is over: the time for deed and practice come. But a man cannot start the ball, singly; a woman must nerve his hand. I stand forth, I, the son of a toiler, and challenge you rich fair ladies—challenge you hand and heart. If there be one noble woman among you, let her come forth here, now, before you all—and place her hand in mine. A man alone, I lose my cause. Man

and woman, we shall win it. It is the cause of Christ, the cause of the human, the cause of the poor and oppressed, of the suffering and the sinning. Who shall be the woman to espouse and win it? Who?—Who?"

In the tense silence, I heard a tremulous breath beside me, then a rustle as of soft wings opening. Then slowly, shyly, yet resolutely, a white hand fluttered into mine.

"I will be the woman," a sweet voice quivered. "*I*—will be the woman."

"Mary!" I heard them shudder. "Mary!"

"Mary!" cried Harold.

He staggered toward her, then turned away with a moan, as the stag moans, reeling, sinking, with the death-dart in its heart.

As he turned, I caught sight of his face —the beautiful, tender, wistful face, strong, yet gentle — stern, yet sweet. His noble brow was dewed as with death-agony; his

luminous eyes shadowed with untold pain. His lips were clinched—brave, mute things racked with anguish; his face was wan, as with the chill of death.

But its pain, its sorrow, its bitter grief were nothing. The horror on it—that was the look that scorched me. It will haunt me in life—it will haunt me in death, it will haunt me in my grave.

XX.

The days that followed sped by on wings of fire—not the fire of love, believe it or not, as you will; but the fire of remorse, the fire of self-scorn, the fire of renewed passionate allegiance to the cause I had well-nigh failed—a fire fed by the woman-hand that had re-kindled the flickering flame.

I had known her to be, by love's right, Harold's, since that look of awful horror had dawned upon his face. I had seen the same look, once before, on the face of a captive plainsman, whose pure young sweetheart was "staked out" by the Indians before his shuddering eyes. He died mad. Had Harold done the same? We never saw him—she or I. Without a word or sign, he had

disappeared. Mad or sane, I knew that he had been dealt his death-hurt. Perhaps, as a wounded animal seeks its lair, he had crept off alone to die.

By my open grave, I swear it—I did not betray him, my friend, through love! Had she been to me but the mere woman, I would have surrendered her, however great the pain. But she was far more than the woman to me—she was the hope, the salvation, the triumph of the cause I had sworn to serve. She was fair and sweet and luring; yet knowing her loved by Harold, I would have left her to him, I swear it, had another of her social class stood forth to take her place! But of all those fair fine ladies, not one but had crouched and shuddered from my outstretched hand. She alone had stepped forward to take it; she alone had responded to my appeal.

"*I will be the woman!*"

O, shy soft words! O, strong, grand words! O, noble, heroic, sacrificial, God-inspired words! "*I will be the woman!*" not the woman for the man, but the woman for mankind—mankind that means not toiling men alone, but worn and weary women, and starving children!

In behalf of these, I could not let her go! In fancy I saw them thronging, day and night, about her; sweat-soaked laborers clamoring for their hire; wasted women with skeleton-hands outstretched; old-faced children stunted by starvation and toil, clinging with bleeding hands, crying with starving lips, to her! She was their hope—and not theirs alone, but the hope of the countless generations of toilers who should follow them. I was not mad enough to dream that

she, the hope, was likewise its fulfilment—that our marriage consummated, the social millennium would ensue. The full flower blooms not from the seed, but from the bud; but the bud is the fruit of the seed, the seed the fruit of the germ; and to be the germ of a royal flower, is it not indeed to be, though indirectly, the royal flower itself?

I gazed into the future, and saw the countless couples who would follow in our steps: brawny men and dainty ladies—gentlemen refined, like Harold, with girls like Nan, their brides. Of these should come forth a mixed race, virile, healthful; born free and equal, Titan-brained, as limbed. And these should look back and call her, their mother, "blessed"—as we call her, who bore man's first hope—Christ!

They named her well, who made her too, a Mary. She was a virgin, white and cold as

snow. She knew no thought either of love or lover. Her unawakened heart was with the sick and poor. Day after day we trod the slums together. She saw the suffering, blinded to the sin. Her calm gaze met the leer of vice, and shamed it; she called the Magdalen sister, and hushed vile curses with pure prayers. She saw in each man, Christ; in each woman, Mary. In the little children I think that she saw both. In scenes of hell she saw the road to heaven; and where she lingered, heaven, indeed, came near.

Our wedding-day approached. I wished the deed done, and she acquiesced. I think, albeit, she scarcely realized it, her thoughts being all for others, that in the meantime she was far from happy. She was an orphan, and of age, therefore quite independent; nevertheless her whilom guardians, with

whom she lived, did all in human power, as did all her aristocratic friends, to prevent our marriage. She went on with her preparations, apparently heedless of their taunts and reproaches; yet the sting of them rankled in her girlish heart, I think, as her wedding-day approached. Her face grew paler, her clear eyes shadowed, troubled. I think she felt a pathetic maidenly longing, in that transition-period of her life, for womanly sympathy, tenderness, love.

More than once it struck me too, that she missed some one friend's presence. Frequently, I caught a wistful look in her eyes as they scanned her crowded drawing-room, a stifled sigh in her voice as she bade her guests good-night. Well I knew in my heart, that the friend she missed was Harold. She never mentioned his name to me. It was by her silence that I knew.

Our wedding was to be a grand one. Evening after evening she planned it, turning the pages of "Aurora Leigh." She looked child-soft and gentle, sitting so; and yet she had the most heroic courage—the courage of her convictions. Her friends had begged her, if she would disgrace them by this marriage, at least to marry privately. I think it was in loyalty to me, as well as in public espousal of our cause, that she determined upon a grand church-wedding.

> "The things we do,
> We do; we'll wear no mask, as if we blushed,"

she said.

XXI.

Two months from the night upon which I had first met her, I ascended the steps of her house, for the last time as a guest. The next day I would enter with her, its master. To-night her lover, to-morrow her husband! It was the eve of our wedding-day.

As I waited to be admitted, it seemed as if, for the first time, I realized all that the impending change implied. A sudden blur and dizziness seemed to come upon me. I walked toward the little reception-room in which, when alone, she had been in the habit of receiving me, as one walks in a dream. To-morrow my wife! and up to that night—I say it truthfully—I had scarcely touched her hand.

She entered the room, slowly, almost timidly. She was very pale; there were traces of tears on her face; her lips were tremulous, her unsmiling eyes shyly lowered. For days I had noticed a look of increasing fear in them. Now that the white lids veiled them, I recognized, with a pang of tender pity, the intuitive, uncomprehended fear of her startled virgin heart.

All to which I had hitherto been blind and deaf and insensible, burst upon me like a lightning-flash. I was no longer the social reformer, but the man; no longer the impersonal tool and instrument, but the living, passionate lover. For the first and last time in my life, my blood asserted itself—the blood traced back to savage chiefs who, finding a maiden fair, had seized and borne her, heedless of shrieks and struggles, to their huts in the *Riesengebirge*, haunt of the savage Van-

dal tribes. A thrill half bliss, half pain, quivered through me; a heat, as of sudden flame, compassed me. The surge of fevered blood rang in my ears. I leaped to my feet and—looked at her—only looked at her!

As her drooped eyes, lifting, met my look, she stopped short in her approach, and with a shuddering cry, shrank back; but she was too late, too late! My passionate arms were around her. My passionate kisses rained upon her brow, cheek, throat; then fell, in burning shower, on her lips. Against my breast I felt her shy heart beating. She resisted, cried out, struggled, then was suddenly still. My impulse spent, I turned her face from my breast, and looked at her. She was white, chill, rigid. She had fainted in my arms.

I laid her on the lounge, and bent, gloating, over her. In her youth, her purity, her

pride, her dainty beauty, mine, mine, all mine! By a terrible oath whose hellish menace roused her, I swore that no other man, no gentleman, should ever take her from me! The oath was born of the premonition that in spite of her promise, in spite of my kisses, in spite of the oath itself, I had lost her! that though to-night was our wedding-eve, the morrow would never dawn whose dusk should see her my wife.

As she revived, I stepped out of her sight. Her eyes opened; she looked about her, confused and questioning. Then she remembered. With a startled moan she hid her face in her hands. Between the tense white fingers I saw the scorching surge from throat to brow of modest vestal blood.

When she discovered my presence she rose from the lounge, and took a step toward me. The vestal blood had ebbed again; her face

was white as marble—no longer the face of a dreamful, shrinking girl, but the face of a woman, tense for battle to the death.

"Forgive me," she said, "O, forgive me, but I cannot marry you! When I gave my reckless promise, I did not realize or understand. It seemed to me a great thing, a grand thing, to step out before that gilded throng, and yield myself up, like a live-offering to the altar, in the name of the poor and down-trodden. What the yielding up meant, not to the impersonal sacrifice, but to the living personal woman, I did not then conceive. But for the last fortnight terrible thoughts have haunted me—thoughts whose full significance burst upon me when, a moment ago, you held me in your arms. I shuddered in them. Forgive me, but I—I sickened in them. O, Otho, I have wronged you sorely, cruelly; yet I beg you, I pray you to have pity on

me! I will dedicate my life to the service of your cause—I will strive for it day and night; I will be your friend, your co-worker, your servant, your slave! But I cannot be your wife, Otho—I cannot be your wife!"

She was wringing her white hands, and sobbing nervously, tearlessly. The shame and anguish on her face would have softened the heart of a gentleman. It hardened mine.

"I have your promise," I cried, "your public promise. In honor, in common justice, it binds you to me. I hold you to it. I refuse to release you. You shall marry me to-morrow!"

"I cannot be your wife!" she repeated.

The devil possessed me.

"You cannot be my wife?" I hissed. "Then why does my hand know the clasp of your hand, why have my arms held you, why has my breast felt the beating of your heart

against it—why, even now, do my kisses burn your face and throat and lips? You cannot be my wife? Then why have I been your lover? Are you not the pure white thing you look? Are you only a whited sepulchre? You are beautiful. You were born for love. Out of all the world of men you have chosen your lover—you must abide by your choice. Between you and any other honest love stand my kisses, even as I stand between you and any other man. I tell you that you are mine! mine! By right of love, as well as by right of promise, I claim you for my wife!"

"I cannot be your wife!" she answered. "If you loved me you would not wish it against my will. My promise was a mistake, Otho. I did not understand, or realize, what it meant. I have been a dreamer, always a dreamer! and my dreams have been not like

the dreams of other girls, of love and lovers; but dreams like yours, abstract, impersonal—dreams of human progress, of social revolution and reform. When I read your book it thrilled, like a grand chord, through me. My soul, my brain, responded. I mistook them for my heart. When I saw you, met you, pleaded with you not to forget your mission—when your sleeping soul awoke like a lion, and I saw the royal thing I had aroused—when your grand appeal, god-voiced, rang divinely, and you waited vainly for one woman to respond—I, dreaming still of ideals, not realities, stepped forth and gave the promise I know now I cannot keep."

"Why can you not keep it?" I demanded.

"Because I do not love you," she faltered.

"You lie!" I cried. "You fail your promise, not because you do not love me—

your promised husband, O, fair false woman! but because you love another."

Her burning blush was her answer.

"Harold!" I hissed, "Harold!"

"Spare me!" she sobbed.

A fierce exultation was in my heart. I saw that she thought her love in vain.

"He is gone," I jeered, pitilessly. "Love did not keep him with you. If in farewell he left one single love-word for you, I will yield you to his arms."

She hid her face in her hands. Through her fingers her tears trickled.

"Not one!" she moaned. "Not one!"

"And you have no pride—no girlish modesty, no womanly self-respect? You avow your love for a man who does not love you? O, shame! shame! shame!"

Her answer was the woman's answer—patient, faithful, self-forgetful.

"I love him," she sobbed. "I love him!"

A fiend of malice possessed me. I caught her in my fierce arms, laughing as she shuddered in them—triumphing in her cruel torture, as I spoke on.

"You are mine," I exulted. "To-night, my sweetheart; to-morrow my wife! You will never be his—his whom you love, his—who loves you!"

"You start, you did not know of his love! You struggle—vainly as a white bird in the net. Your lover's arms are around you—your lover's to-night, to-morrow your husband's! Yes, he loves you. He has loved you for years and years. But he is no common flesh-and-blood man, to claim the woman he loves, because he loves her. He is a gentleman—who waits on his lady's mood like a slave on his mistress. You were 'happy in your girlhood's dream,' he said. He would

not disturb it. He waited, as those dying of thirst wait for water, till you should waken from it. He told his heart to me, because I was his friend. He yearned not only for the sweetheart, but for the wife, the home, the children. 'Sweetheart! wife! home maker! mother!' he cried; 'when shall my dream come true?' You betrayed him. I did not. I did not ask you to put your hand in mine. But since you chose to put it in mine unasked, I hold it, I keep it. I claim it, do you hear me? Of you, a small, frail woman, I claim it, *I*, a man! Yield, beloved, yield! You have given your word —stand by it. You shall never regret it. I, your lover, have played your master. I, your husband, will be your slave. You may do with me as you will—make of me angel or devil. See! I throw myself at your feet. On my knees I beg your hand. Women

like you are loyal: your heart, your love will follow it. Only marry me to-morrow! To-morrow be my wife!"

"I cannot be your wife!" she shuddered. "I would rather die."

Fateful words, inspired of devils, why did God let her utter them?"

XXII.

I MADE my way to my room in a daze of passionate emotion. I loved her—and I had lost her. Full well I knew that neither the morrow, nor any after-morrow would ever make her my wife! Yet before I left her I had extracted her promise to let the farce of bridal preparation go on even to the end.

"Grant me at least love's whim," I said. "Come to me here, a quarter before the appointed church-hour, in your bridal veil. I will trust to your heart, to your honor, to redeem your word. If at the last moment you fail me, I will submit, but not until then. I beg you, grant me this favor. It is the least that I may claim."

"I will grant you it," she said, "but—I shall fail you. I cannot be your wife!"

She did not repeat that she would rather die than be my wife, but no repetition was necessary. The words, once said, were said for always. They were ringing in my ears as I entered my room.

The gas was lighted, and a vase of flowers stood before my mirror. The woman who cared for the room had placed them there, in honor of my wedding-eve. Upon my bed lay my wedding-suit, fresh from the hands of a fashionable Fifth Avenue tailor. I passed it by with a single glance, and went to my desk. Touching a spring, I opened a secret drawer, and took from its dark recess my father's dagger. I drew it from its sheath, and passed its keen edge caressingly along my palm. Re-sheathing it, I took the suit from the bed, and slipped the dag-

ger into the breast-pocket of my wedding-coat. Then, dressed as I was, I flung myself full-length upon my bed, and slept deeply, heavily, until morning.

The morning of my wedding-day!

XXIII.

We were to be married at high noon. On the stroke of the half before the noon hour, I entered my carriage and was driven to her home. On the way I passed the church chosen for the ceremony. A line of carriages was already drawing up before it. I caught a confused sight of prancing steeds and showy liveries and gorgeously gowned guests, as I passed. Both streets and sidewalks were blocked by a struggling human mass of the "unwashed" type. I saw the policemen draw their clubs as I drove past them.

The servant who opened the door stared and smiled scornfully, yet indulgently, as he admitted me. Evidently he was surprised

at my appearance, and attributed it to my ignorance of social proprieties as well as to the proverbial impatience of love. I heard the voices of the bridesmaids in the drawing-room, and knew, by love's unerring instinct, that my darling was among them. Then my heart gave a leap, as a man's familiar voice sounded—a low, rich voice, my friend's voice, Harold's!

A long hall, a room in itself, separated the apartments. I heard a soft step upon it, the rustle of silken robes along its floor. Then she stood before me, the fair sweet woman I loved—who in an hour, or never, would be my wife! I took an eager step toward her, but she motioned me back, imperiously. Pure as a pearl in the white setting of her wedding-dress, she awed me. Her veil seemed folded round her, like an angel's wing.

"I have kept my promise," she said. "I have gratified your whim. As you desired, you see me in my wedding-dress. Now we must part. As I warned you, I must fail you. I am a coward, traitor, what you will. No hard name is too hard for me. From my heart, I regret my wrong against you. But I cannot be your wife!"

Again she waved me back, but this time I defied her. I caught her two white hands in mine, and drew her, by force, to me.

"I love you," I panted; "I love you! not with the brute passion you fear, and from which you shrink and shudder, but with the man's love, pure and strong and tender—the love of the reverent lover, of the fond and faithful husband. If I am not a gentleman, you shall make me one. I will do by you as nobly as a king does by his queen. Do not doubt me! Do not fear me! Trust

me. You shall never regret your trust—I swear it! In love's name, in honor's name, in the name of the human world whose voice of hopeless anguish cries out to you, fulfil your promise, sweetheart. Be my wife!"

"I cannot be your wife!" she sobbed.

"Listen!" I cried, "I passed the church as I drove here. The carriage-guests were arriving; the foot-guests blocked their wheels. The policemen, with cruel clubs, beat back the poor and helpless. I saw a white-haired old woman crouch beneath a blow, and heard a poor child sob. You know what our marriage means to such as these—the rift in their web of wrongs—the wedge which, sooner or later, shall overthrow the social structure which is an outrage to humanity, a shame to democracy, as it now stands. If you fail them, who will be their champion? No other woman, so

help me God! for if you are false, all women are betrayers! I will speak no more of love. Love is well, but there is something better—duty. Your duty to these—fulfil it! Be my wife!"

"I cannot be your wife!" she moaned.

"You shall be my wife!" I hissed. "I say you shall be, you shall be!"

The words aroused her high, if gentle, spirit. Her hands were passive in mine—she scorned the futile struggle to release them; but her mute eyes, lifted suddenly, defied me.

"I will not be your wife," she said, "though you drag me by brute force to the altar. I have done you a cruel wrong—I bitterly regret it. But my regret is as vain as is your ungenerous persistence. Nothing can undo the past; but the past does not control the future. Because I have made one terrible mistake, I will not make a worse

one. I beg, I insist, that this painful interview now be ended. My decision is final. I will not be your wife."

I do not know what betrayed her secret as she spoke the words, whether her unconscious emphasis as she said "your" wife, or her sudden blush, or a tell-tale flash in her eyes of Love's shy happiness. I only know that I divined it. Mechanically my hand stole to my breast. The hilt of the dagger met it. As my hand shut on it, I pressed her closer to me. So we stood, for one mute moment. Then I spoke.

"You will not be my wife," I said, "and yet—this is your wedding-day?"

She glanced up, surprised and startled at my keen question. I felt her tremble, as she hesitated. Then she decided, I think, that it was my right to hear the truth.

"Otho!" she sobbed, "forgive me! I told

you that I love him. You told me that he —loves—me. When I said that he left no word of love behind him, I spoke the truth, but not the whole truth. He had left me, with his address, this single line in message: '*When you need a friend, remember that I live but to serve you!*' Last night, after you left, I—I wrote to him. He came this morning. He told me that you spoke truly — that he loves me, that he fled lest his love should betray itself to the affianced wife of his friend. Then I asked him—you hear me, Otho?—*I* asked him, begged him, prayed him on my knees, to marry me, in your place, to-day!—then, to take me far away — out of sight and sound of the wondering crowd, the mocking laughs, the curious faces! He grants my request only on condition that you, his friend, my affianced husband, second it by your con-

sent:—not otherwise! His love is strong, but his honor is stronger. Otho, you are a man; the strength, the power, is on your side. Be generous, be noble, be chivalrous, be a gentleman! I love him — he loves me. Give us to each other! Give me my husband! Give your friend his wife!"

My hand shut closer on the dagger-hilt. I felt the sharp blade slipping from its sheath.

"Sweetheart!" I pleaded, "I love you. I can yield you to no other lover. You are my promised wife. The church is crowded with guests, the minister waits. The time is come to fulfil your promise. Be my wife!"

"I will never be your wife," she replied, no longer gently, but with cold, proud scorn. "I—would—rather—die!"

The next moment—I know not how it happened—the dagger was buried hilt-deep in her heart.

XXIV.

The blow was swift and sure. A low moan, heard by me alone, was the only sign she gave, as heavily upon my arm she sank back, dying. Then I realized what I had done. With desperate haste, I lowered her to the floor, and, tearing open her bridal-bodice, groped for the wound. The beautiful full white breast was still life-warm; under my passionate hand I felt its soft flesh shudder. As my fingers touched the gaping wound, I caught up the reeking dagger, slitting corset and lace and linen with its blood-stained blade. Then, with futile hands, I strove to stanch the flow of virginal life-blood. Red and warm, red and warm, it oozed between the edges of the wound,

despite the pressure of my trembling fingers. I watched the slow, sure flow with awful fascination. It dyed my finger-tips, mounted slowly toward my palm. Soon, to its wrist, my hand was steeped in blood. My murderer's hand! As I wrested it from her breast with a shuddering cry of horror, her glazing eyes unclosed.

"Harold!" she gasped, "Harold!" and with one sigh, was dead.

XXV.

I know not when they came, or who first discovered us. I think it was a woman's shriek that first pierced the lethargy of my death-like trance. I felt myself torn from her, and saw them shudder from me. Suddenly, between me and her, flashed a man's tall figure. He sunk on his knees and drawing the bodice over the fair nude bosom, pressed his lips, with tender reverence, to her chill white brow.

"Thank God!" I heard him murmur. "Thank God!"

As he lifted his face, no trace of the old horror was upon it—a chastened life-long sorrow was in its place.

To him, as to her, the thought of her in my arms had been so loathsome, that the skeleton arms of Death, in contrast, were welcome, sweet.

XXVI.

This pain—in my heart. Brandy, quick! —What if I cheat Justice—even yet?—But no! it passes—

Better? Oh, yes, better—worse luck!

More visitors? But, yes, I had forgotten that all must come to-night, if ever. To-morrow the electric chair and—death: "*A life for a life.*" Just if not merciful—human revenge, if not Christian forgiveness! I make no appeal.

Frank! you? And who behind you? Harold?—and Nan—Nan, with a child on her breast? My God! my God!

My child? And Nan true to me? Worked till her mother found her? The

mother's unfailing instinct—stronger, surer than love's!—

Father, the marriage-service. These friends will witness.

Nan, at last you are an honest woman—my wife!

God! this pain in my heart! The chill, the dark—what is it? Nan, my wife, where are you? I feel you—I cannot see you—

. . . . . .

Mein Vater! Why, father! So pale, so wan and weeping. Why do you glare so at me? I kept my word! I was true to my oath! "*I spilled the blood, to the last red drop—of the woman who stood between—*"

He shudders, and cries out. He is tortured, consumed by the hell-flame of vain remorse! He gnashes his teeth on a devil's curse—He is gone!

Poor father! Poor father!

. . . . . .

So cold—so—dark—

Air! Brandy! I am faint, sick, dying! Save me! I am fearful—I have sinned! My hand is stained with innocent blood—

What is he saying, the good old priest? "*The Blood of Christ shall wash it!*"

Christ, I believe!—My father shrive me! By the Blood of Christ—I shall be made —whiter than snow—whiter than snow—

Harold — Frank — Nan — give me your hands.

Once more—on my brow—your benediction, my Father.

. . . . . .

Mother! And beside her, Mary! O Mary!—She smiles—she says she forgives me—she is looking past me, to Harold—

Harold, Mary is beckoning to you. She is whispering "*Soon, soon, soon!*"

The song of angels . . . the light . . . of heaven . . .

. . . . . .

Mother! Mary! what are you saying?

"*Hate loses causes; Love wins them!*"

Love . . . Love . . . Love . . .

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